

School chief is optimistic

Thursday, January 22, 1981

(F11A)

Despite a net loss of \$1.1 million in expected state revenue, the Farmington Public Schools has continued to operate without a dramatic reduction of services, Superintendent Lewis Schulman told the Board of Education Tuesday in his mid-year report.

"Inflation, coupled with a 33 percent reduction in motor vehicle production, has led to sharply reduced tax revenues for Michigan," Schulman said.

A reserve fund enabled the district to absorb the cuts. Also, the sale of two school buildings and two parcels of land owned by the district enhanced the budget generously.

Highmeadow School, closed last June due to declining enrollment, was sold to the Lutheran High School Association for \$332,000. Bond School, vacant since it was sold in 1974, was sold for \$340,000 and will be developed as an office building.

Twenty acres of property brought the district a down payment of \$30,000 from purchaser Jay Ross, with a \$251,000 balance to be paid over three years. Another eight-acre parcel in Section 25 is being sold for \$1,050.

"The business management of the district continues on an exemplary path," Schulman said.

"The district isn't prone to frivolous, innovative projects; it is strongly amenable to those changes that strengthen content and substance."

IN THE PAST five years, the tax levy has dropped from 39 mills (third highest among Oakland County's 29 school districts) to 35.28 mills this year (16th highest).

The past five years have seen a reduction in class size, enormous improvements in school supplies, equipment and repairs to school buildings and introduction of new programs, Schulman said.

New programs include education for the gifted and programs in computer education.

The first half of the school year has seen:

- Student enrollment of 12,047, a decline of 508 students over the previous year.

- Introduction of middle schools and inclusion of ninth graders in the high schools.

- Introduction of attendance and parking lot supervision for the high schools.

- Introduction of increased high school graduation requirements.

- Introduction of computers in all schools.

- Expenditure of \$658,433 to remodel, repair and re-equip buildings.

- Introduction of a new severely emotionally impaired county program, in cooperation with the Michigan State Department of Mental Health, at Farmington Training Center.

"The healthy economic growth of the Farmington community has enabled the school district to continue to offer a comprehensive educational program," Schulman said.

"HOWEVER, THE FUTURE is uncertain; public school advocates have good cause to be apprehensive."

"There is a possibility of vouchers and tuition tax credits entering the national scene. Comparison and competition exist whether we like it or not."

"Instead of being immobilized by external threats over which we have little control, we must garner support and cooperation from groups who have a stake in public education."

Schulman identified areas where improvements are needed:

- The decline in secondary student enrollment is a signal to sustain the curriculum in secondary schools. Re-

duction in school enrollment has resulted in the reassignment of some teachers to areas in which they have limited experience.

- Initiative begun through the middle school study must be enhanced, sustained and reviewed.

- With the closing of schools, useful plans for their use must be developed.

"A strength and a weakness of public education is the smorgasbord of services provided — reading, social work, speech and language, gifted, enrichment; the list goes on."

It is simplistic to imagine that going back to basics and reducing programs would be acceptable. What is more realistic and defensible is to understand that primary education goals and objectives — a need for literacy and competency — can be rendered within the context of the existing school structure."

Property tax workshop set

The Farmington Chamber of Commerce will present a workshop on property taxes on Thursday, Jan. 29 at Botsford Inn.

The fee is \$10 a person, which includes breakfast.

Charles H. Williams, a certified public accountant with Williams, Meisel-

bach & Thalacker of Farmington Hills will address the morning panel.

John Saylor, Farmington assessor, and Robert Roemer, Farmington Hills assessor, will also be present.

Reservations must be confirmed by Jan. 27.

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